

Message Text

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ACTION SCS-06

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INR-07 INRE-00 L-03 H-01 HA-05 DLOS-09 PA-01
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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9432
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL HONG KONG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SINGAPORE 0286

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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS TO INFO ADDRESSEES

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: CASC, OTRA (YACHT BRILLIG), VM, US
SUBJECT: DEBRIEFING OF CREW OF YACHT BRILLIG

REFS: A) SINGAPORE 0274; (B) SINGAPORE 0078

1. DURING INITIAL, WATERSIDE TALK JANUARY 19 WITH BRILLIG CREW, WE MADE CLEAR TO THE CREW THAT THEY WERE UNDER NO OBLIGATION TO DISCUSS THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH US. WE ALSO REVIEWED USG EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF THE BRILLIG CREW. THEY EXPRESSED APPRECIATION. AFFEL AND DICKERMAN, WHOM WE SAW FIRST, ALSO EXPRESSED REGRET THAT THE USG CONSULAR SERVICE HAD BEEN TAXED BY THEIR PROBLEMS. CREW READILY AGREED TO DESCRIBE THEIR EXPERIENCES.

2. CREW ORIGINALLY ESTIMATED THAT BRILLIG WAS SIXTY MILES OFF VIETNAMESE COASTAL MAINLAND WHEN THEY WERE TAKEN INTO
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CUSTODY. RECALCULATED LATER WITH THE BENEFIT OF AN ADDITIONAL SUNFIX, THEY FIGURED THAT THEY WERE TWENTY-FIVE MILES SOUTH OF HON KHOAI ISLAND. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE FREQUENT SWUALLS, WHEN SWUALLS ABATED VISABILITY WAS GENERALLY GOOD AND THEY HAD A GOOD VIEW OF THE ENTIRE HORIZON. THEY ESTIMATE A VISIBILITY AROUND SIXTEEN MILES WHEN THE HORIZON WAS CLEAR. THUS, THEY CONCLUDE THAT THEY WERE AT NO TIME WITHIN VIETNAMESE TERRI-

TORIAL WATERS, NOR DID THEY SEE LAND AT THE GENERAL TIME OF THEIR ARREST.

3. BRILLIG WAS SUDDENTLY ATTACKED BY THREE FISHING BOATS LATER JOINED BY A FOURTH, COMING FROM A RAINQUALL. FISHING BOATS FIRED INTO AIR ABOVE BRILLIG. FOURTH BOAT WAS A REFUGEE BOAT WHICH HAD BEEN SEIZED AND BOARDED BY VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES, ACCORDING TO BRILLIG CREW. VIETNAMESE INTERROGATORS LATER EXPUNGED THIS INFORMATION FROM THE REPORTS (OR CONFESSIONS) SIGNED BY THE BRILLIG CREW. FISHING BOATS TERMINATED THE ATTACK MOMENTARILY, APPARENTLY WAITING ON THE FOURTH BOAT TO CATCH UP. DURING THIS TEMPORARY RESPITE, BRILLIG SENT RADIO MESSAGES AND SOS AND CONTINUED ON THEIR VOYAGE, ATTEMPTING TO ESCAPE. FOR THIS EPISODE THEY WERE LATER CHARGED WITH HAVING ATTEMPTED TO ESCAPE ARREST AND FOR ILLEGALLY USING RADIO EQUIPMENT.

4. THEY WERE TAKEN TO SAIGON AND JAILED INDIVIDUALLY UNTIL THEY WERE REUNITED DECEMBER 22, AFTER WHICH THEY RENTED A SMALL VILLA IN SAIGON. INTERROGATION BEGAN IMMEDIATELY ON ARRIVAL IN SAIGON AND LASTED ABOUT THREE DAYS. ACCUSATIONS CENTERED ON AN ESPIONAGE MISSION, WHICH VIETNAMESE INSISTED REPEATEDLY THE BRILLIG WAS ENGAGED IN. THEY WERE QUERIED EXHAUSTIVELY CONCERNING WHO WAS BACK OF THEIR ALLEGED SPYING MISSION. FOLLOWING THIS INTERROGATION, THEY HEARD NOTHING FOR SEVERAL WEEKS. DICKERMAN HEARD NOTHING FOR SEVEN WEEKS. DELLENBAUGH AND AFFEL WERE REAPPROACHED BY THEIR INTERROGATORS EARLIER, CONFIDENTIAL

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AFFEL ON NOVEMBER 29. DURING THE SECOND ROUND OF INTERROGATION, VIETNAMESE BEGAN TRYING TO MAKE THE THREE REFINED THEIR STATEMENTS TO ADMIT THAT THE BRILLIG HAD VIOLATED VIETNAMESE TERRITORIAL WATERS, RESISTED ARREST, EMPLOYED ILLEGALLY "UNUSUAL COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT"; AND TRANSPORTED "ILLEGAL SUBSTANCES". THE ONLY NON-MILITARY INTERROGATOR FOR DELLENBAUGH ENCOURAGED HER TO REFINED HER STATEMENT TO ADMIT BEING IN TERRITORIAL WATERS. HE CONVINCED HER THAT THE DETAILS OF THE STATEMENT WERE LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE PRINCIPLE. AT THAT POINT SHE BECAME CONVINCED THAT THEY WERE TO BE RELEASED BUT, AS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE, VIETNAMESE HAD TO ESTABLISH A CASE AND BASIS FOR RELEASING THEM. SOON THEREAFTER SHE SIGNED A STATEMENT ADMITTING THAT THE BRILLIG HAD VIOLATED VIETNAMESE TERRITORIAL WATERS. AFFEL FOLLOWED WITH A SIMILAR ADMISSION ABOUT DECEMBER 12. WHEN DICKERMAN SAW WHAT THE OTHER TWO HAD DONE, HE SIGNED.

5. ON DECEMBER 22 THE THREE WERE REUNITED IN A LARGE HALL FOR A "SETTLEMENT MEETING." A VIETNAMESE AND A US TV CREW WERE ON HAND FOR THE OCCASION. THE STATEMENTS ADMITTING VIOLATION OF TERRITORIAL WATERS, ILLEGALLY USING "UNUSUAL COMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT" AND TRANSPORTING "ILLEGAL SUBSTANCES" WERE READ. VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES THEN ANNOUNCED SEVERAL FEATURES OF THE

SETTLEMENT: A) "ILLEGAL SUBSTANCES" WOULD BE SEIZED; B) "UN-USUAL EQUIPMENT" - (UNDERWATER CAMERA, SCUBA DIVING EQUIPMENT, AND AN "UNDERWATER RADIO") - WOULD BE SEIZED; C) BRILLIG WOULD BE RELEASED; D) CREW MUST PAY A FINE OF \$243,000 AND DEPART VIETNAM WITHIN 48 HOURS.

NOTE BY OC/T: SECTION 2 OF 2 SINGAPORE 0286 HAS BEEN SERVICED. WILL FOLLOW WHEN RECEIVED.

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INR-07 INRE-00 L-03 H-01 HA-05 DLOS-09 PA-01
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SINGAPORE 0286

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6. AMERICANS BELIEVE THE VIETNAMESE GENUINELY EXPECTED TO RECEIVED THE MONEY FROM THEIR FAMILIES, OR ELSE THAT "ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE WOULD WRITE OUT A CHECK". AMERICANS TOLD THE VIETNAMESE THAT SUCH A SUM WAS IMPOSSIBLE. IN RESPONSE, THEY WERE INSTRUCTED TO SEND A TELEGRAM TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT (OVER 250 WORDS FOR WHICH THEY PAID OVER \$300), SPELLING OUT THE CONDITIONS OF THEIR RELEASE AND THE NEED FOR THE FUNDS. AFFEL SAID THAT THEY CHOSE THEIR WORDS CAREFULLY FOR FEAR THAT THEIR FAMILIES WOULD ACTUALLY PAY THE FINES. HE SAID THAT FOR THIS REASON THEY CHOSE PHRASEOLOGY LIKE "BECAUSE OF THE SITUATION, THE STATE DEPARTMENT WILL BE INTERESTED" AND THAT THEY HAD BEEN "PRESSED TO SEND THE CABLE" AND FINALLY THEY APOLOGIZED TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT FOR THE TROUBLE THEY HAD CAUSED. AFTER HASSLING OVER SOME OF THEIR PHRASEOLOGY IN THE CABLE, THEY ASSUMED THAT THE MESSAGE WAS SENT.

6. SHORTLY AFTER THIS, IT BECAME CLEAR TO THE THREE THAT THE VIETNAMESE WERE VERY ANXIOUS TO FIND A MEANS TO RELEASE

THE CREW EVEN THOUGH THE FINE WAS NOT IMMEDIATELY BEING PAID. AFFEL FOR EXAMPLE WAS QUERIED ABOUT HOW LONG IT WOULD
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TAKE HIM TO PAY THE FINE IF HE WAS RELEASED FIRST. HE EXPLAINED THAT IF HE EARNED \$8000 A YEAR, AS HE HAD THE PREVIOUS YEAR, AND IF HE LIVED VERY MODESTLY, IT WOULD STILL TAKE TEN YEARS TO REPAY HIS PORTION OF THE FINE. THE VIETNAMESE SUGGESTED THAT THE FINE MUST BE PAID MORE QUICKLY. FINALLY, THE AMERICANS AGREED TO SIGN A NOTE THAT THE FINE WOULD BE REPAID AFTER THEIR RELEASE. ALTHOUGH THEY HAD EXPECTED THE VIETNAMESE TO WRITE INTO THE NOTE A SPECIFIED TIME PERIOD WITHIN WHICH IT SHOULD BE REPAID, THE NOTE THEY WERE ASKED TO SIGN SAID NOTHING ABOUT TIME FOR REPAYMENT. THIS EPISODE CONVINCED THEM THAT THE VIETNAMESE WERE EMBARRASSED BY THEIR PROLONGED PRESENCE IN VIETNAM AND THAT THEIR OVER-RIDING CONSIDERATION WAS TO GET THE THREE OUT OF VIETNAM AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

7. ON JANUARY 2, THEY WERE TOLD THAT THEY MUST DEPART IMMEDIATELY, THE NEXT DAY. ALL THEIR POSSESSIONS - 1500 POUNDS OF BOOK AND THINGS, DELLENBAUGH SAID-WERE DUMPED ON THE DECK OF THE BRILLIG. SOME QUICK REPAIRS WERE MADE AND THEY DEPARTED FOR VUNG TAU JANUARY 4. ALTHOUGH THE AMERICANS THOUGHT THEY COULD HAVE SAILED SAFELY, THE VIETNAMESE TOLD THEM THERE WAS BAD WEATHER CLOSE BY AND THEREFORE THEY WERE DETAINED UNTIL JANUARY 12.

8. BRILLIG CREW WAS NEVER FORMALLY CHARGED, IN THE US JUDICIAL SENSE. THEY WROTE AND REFINED THEIR STATEMENTS AND THEN ATTENDED THE "SETTLEMENT MEETING".

9. CREW RECEIVED MAIL TWICE - IN MID-NOVEMBER AND MID-DECEMBER. AFTER RECEIVING MAIL THEY WERE ALLOWED TO SEND POSTCARDS. DURING THEIR INITIAL DETENTION, THEY REPEATEDLY ASKED TO SEE A THIRD PARTY, A WESTERN OFFICIAL, FOR EXAMPLE, THE RED CROSS, SWEDISH OR SWISS EMBASSY OFFICIALS. NO SUCH THIRD PARTY WAS ALLOWED TO CONTACT THEM.

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10. CREW WAS AWARE OF USG EFFORTS ON THEIR BEHALF. ONE OF AFFEL'S INTERROGATORS TOLD HIM THAT THE USG HAD REPEATEDLY REQUESTED THAT THE BRILLIG CREW BE RELEASED. THEY ALSO LEARNED FROM THE US TV CREW THAT THE SUBJECT WAS BROUGHT UP AT THE DECEMBER 19-29 PARIS MEETING BETWEEN HOLBROOKE AND PHAN HIEN.

11. WE ARE MEETING CREW AGAIN JANUARY 20 FOR FURTHER TALK.

12. COMMENT: THIS APPEARS TO BE A FAIRLY STRAIGHTFORWARD
ACCOUNT, BUT THEY SEEM, AT LEAST IN THE INITIAL DEBRIEFING,
TO BE DODGING SOMEWHAT THE ISSUE OF ALLEGATIONS ABOUT DRUGS
AND THE RELATION SUCH CHARGES MAY HAVE TO THE FINE LEVIED BY
THE VIETNAMESE.
HOLDRIDGE

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